

Critics'

THEATRE REVIEWS

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* Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play during the week of June 3, 1940.

† Louisiana Purchase opened last Tuesday, May 28th, at the Imperial Theatre. Newspaper Critics' reviews in this issue.

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New York Post

New York Herald Tribune

New York Times

New York Daily News

New York World-Telegram

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"Louisiana Purchase"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, May 29, 1940

"Louisiana Purchase" Full of Quality, Talent and Irving Berlin

"Louisiana Purchase," musical comedy with music and lyrics by Irving Berlin and book by Morrie Ryskind. Produced by B. G. De Sylva at the Imperial Theatre, New York, May 28, 1940.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

I HAVE a feeling that the late Hughie Long himself would have liked "Louisiana Purchase," though what it does to the politics of the Hughie Long persuasion and practices is enough to rub them out in any other country except this tolerant and casual democracy.

Hughie believed in sharing the fun as well as the wealth, and there is a good bit of fun to share in "Louisiana Purchase." More, I think, than in any of the other musical revues that have recently come this way.

In addition to the fun, which can be credited to that trustworthy pair, William Gaxton and Victor Moore, aided by Morrie Ryskind, who wrote their lines, and abetted by Vera Zorina, who furnishes her own, and Irene Bordoni, with banes, who comes home joyfully to accept the best chance she has had in a long time.

In addition to the fun there is a score that only Irving Berlin could have written, and a half dozen topical lyrics that only Berlin would have thought of.

Generous Additions

It adds up, thanks to the producer's generosity, he being the B. G. De Sylva who selected "DuBarry Was a Lady" for last Fall's Broadway number, and who has a way with

him and an eye of his own for these opulent entertainments—it adds up to considerable more show than you are customarily offered, even at high tariffs.

Mr. Gaxton represents the Louisiana interests of the late Hughie. Of course it is all fiction, being based on no more than Mr. Berlin and Mr. Ryskind have read in the papers, including much which Mr. Westbrook Pegler has written.

Mr. Moore is a United States Senator, Oliver P. Loganberry, from New Hampshire, who is sent into the deep South to investigate a certain Louisiana Purchase Corporation, Inc. There is something of the New England hick

about Senator Loganberry, but more of the shrewd Yankee who is a match for any musical comedy crook ever invented.

Mr. Gaxton and his quartet of double dealers seek to frame Senator Loganberry. Adds to interest him in sex in much the same old bedroom farce fashion that has been used on stage senators from the first reckonings of political satires.

Victor Scores

Mr. Moore is highly amusing as the timid and gullible but shrewd Loganberry. He gets hooked by Zorina, but escapes as her fiance, he gets hooked again by Bordoni, but defeats her schemes by calling in a justice of the peace and marrying her.

Mr. Gaxton is again full of bounce, clear diction, slick hair and general likableness. Zorina is lovely of face and figure and gorgeously graceful in the dance, being especially attractive in a fantasy number in which she dreams of trading a young man's love for an old man's name. Her premier danseur is Charles Laskey, and very helpful.

The Bordoni has a couple of good songs, including "Tomorrow Is a Lovely Day." So has Carol Bruce, including "The Lord Done Fixed Up My Soul."

There is the Berlin ballad strain in "You're Lonely and I'm Lonely," which Mr. Moore and Mlle. Zorina gave value, in spite of a slight, gargling effect in their singing.

It is rating musical revues that gets a fellow down in this business. Most of them, being generously staged, well scored and of average merit in story, are of three-star value as entertainment.

But occasionally one comes along that tops the others in these decisions. Then what are you going to do. Give it three-plus obviously.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, May 29, 1940

Berlin's Louisiana Purchase Is Superb Musical Comedy

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

THE bright, new, musical comedy that B. G. De Sylva brought into the Imperial Theater last night is called Louisiana Purchase, and, as its name would imply,

it is a satirical treatment of certain scandalous history in one of our great Southern commonwealths. As satire it is moderately effective, but as musical comedy it is superb and I think it will become a summer smash.

The good old team of Victor Moore and William Gaxton are romping on the stage again—the human timorous and the elegant man-of-the-world, Casper Milquetoast and Mr. Big, the Timid Soul and the Man of Action. With them is Irene Bordoni,

sparkling and gay and happy and handsome. And, of course, there is Vera Zorina whom some people consider beautiful.

You will have to hunt through the lower brackets of the cast, however, to find the name of the newcomer who, to me at least, is the important discovery of the late season. There generally is one in every new show, and in this one she is Carol Bruce, who has graduated from movie shorts, road companies and traveling orchestras, into full grown musical comedies. Miss Bruce has radiant youth, a personality that reaches out over the footlights, and a voice and manner of delivery that drive every song home with a flourish. Spotlight for Miss Bruce, please, Mr. De Sylva!

Morrie Ryskind, who wrote the book for Louisiana Purchase, has altered the charac-

ter of the eternal fall guy, Mr. Moore, though not enough to diminish the comic value of that seeming helplessness which is Mr. Moore's trademark. In the role of a New Hampshire Senator who has gone to New Orleans to investigate a corrupt administration, there is enough Yankee shrewdness to offset the customary bewilderment and mental confusion of which Mr. Moore has always been the victim in previous comedies. And in this one he is well on his way to the White House—if he can only cross a picket line—at the final curtain.

Despite the possession of a sort of rustic common sense and the accumulated wisdom of 30 years in politics, Mr. Moore is nevertheless not permitted to abandon the quality of

innocence and guilelessness that make his characterization invariably charming. His pathetic homesickness is there and his disarming naivete in the presence of bold women, always a delight to an audience. In all this, Mr. Moore gave us his usual magnificent performance. Mr. Gaxton was admirable, as usual.

The musical play is lavishly mounted, beautifully costumed, and abounds in dancing talent, and this brings us to consideration of Irving Berlin's important share in the proceedings.

There is a swing and tunelessness to Mr. Berlin's music that belong to nobody else in the song writing business, and he has given us some of the most entrancing tunes of recent years in Louisiana Purchase. The theme song, titled from the play, and as sung by Miss Bruce, should have a sweeping success, and "The Lord Done Fixed Up My Soul," a spiritual in swing, is colorful and thrilling. "Latinas Know How" in the manner of a rumba should also be popular everywhere. Miss Bordoni is given a charming melody in "Tomorrow Is a Lovely Day."

The dancing is exceptionally good. In many numbers ballet, directed by the expert George Balanchine, is merged with modern forms arranged by Carl Randall, and the effect is striking. A chorus of especially pretty young women and a group of ballerinas who have more pulchritude and fewer knobby legs than most toe dancers complete the picture.

Another pleasant addition to the show is that of the Martins, a quartet of swing singers who provide good musical background for Miss Bruce's songs.

Louisiana Purchase is somewhat right wing in its politics, but that doesn't bother people like those who paid \$1.50 a seat to see it last night. It does not, however, make its gentle jibing at the administration particularly bitter, and as far as holding up Louisiana corruption to ridicule, it doesn't let reform get in the way of its comedy. I rather liked the idea, though, of the college dean down there who had to sign his papers with an X.

Louisiana Purchase is roaring fun.

"Louisiana Purchase"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, May 29, 1940

'Louisiana Purchase,' Berlin Musical Opens at the Imperial Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

YOU will not need to grace yourself against the pungent tonic of political satire when you visit "Louisiana Purchase," which opened at the Imperial last evening. Politics are freely mentioned and wheezes now and then have social significance, but the mood is one of luxurious relaxation. Lovers sing to the lilting music of Irving Berlin; Victor Moore's gentle, wistful droilery is an innocent delight, and Vera Zorina glips and sways in melodious dance. All is carefree at the Imperial, and the world is gayly colored.

Morrie Ryskind, who wrote the book, may at one time have had sharper ideas.

His nimble plot is laid in a "mythical state" which, the chorus agrees in an opening number shall be called Louisiana. (If there really is, by some odd coincidence, a State called Louisiana neither the chorus nor the authors are to be held responsible.) In that improbable commonwealth there is political corruption. Stolen lumber is sold three times over to the university and all the important officials may be reached by calling a given number and asking for Mabel. But the boss, as it turns out, still can fall in love.

Senator Oliver P. Loganberry, a Republican with presidential leanings and investigatorial habits, intrudes on this paradise. Mr. Moore is Senator Loganberry, shrewder than usual, but in as many scrapes as always—plump and wide-eyed in a bustling world as always, and as always incredibly funny. Zorina is used by the boss, a Mr. Gaxton, to en-

tice Senator Loganberry and everybody wins in the end. Mr. Ryskind is lightheartedly malicious about the New Deal at intervals and all is neat and expert. But none of this is nearly as important as the music of Mr. Berlin, or the presence of Mr. Moore and Miss Zorina or the demonstration by Mr. Gaxton of the way of a lady with a giraffe. None of it is as important as the return of Irene Bordoni, if you come to that, or the charming singing of Carol Bruce. "Louisiana Purchase" is never as witty as it is smoothly graceful in staging and performance.

Mr. Berlin, coming back after eight years in West Coast retirement, brings a score with him. Probably it is not his best; certainly it is fresh and gay and lilting. You will be hearing most of the songs—the title song, for example, and "Tomorrow Is a Lovely Day" and

'LOUISIANA PURCHASE'

A musical comedy in two acts; music and lyrics by Irving Berlin; book by Morrie Ryskind, based on a story by B. G. De Sylva; book staged by Edgar MacGregor; ballets by George Balanchine; costumes and scenery by Tom Lee; presented at the Imperial Theater on May 28, 1940, by Mr. De Sylva. The cast:

Secretary	Georgia Carroll
Sam Liebowitz	John Eliot
Col. Davis D. Davis, Sr.	Robert Pitkin
Abner	Nicodemus
Davis D. Davis, Jr.	Ray Mayer
Dean Manning	Ralph Riggs
Police Capt. Whitfield	E. H. Robins
Jim Taylor	William Gaxton
Beatrice	Carol Bruce
Lee Davis	Nick Long, Jr.
Emmy-Lou	April Ames
Marina Van Linden	Vera Zorina
Madame Bordelaise	Irene Bordoni
Senator Oliver P. Loganberry	Victor Moore
Alphonse	Charles La Torre

"The Lord Done Fixed Up My Soul," which is very nearly the best of them all. Mr. Berlin has provided grand music for all the sprites to dance to, and for the lovely Zorina to float upon, and Mr. Ryskind's book includes moments of carnival and an interlude of fantasy as well as plenty of occupation for Mr. Moore and Mr. Gaxton. Mr. Berlin's lyrics are jacy and, generally, amusing. Tom Lee has colored sets and costumes lavishly and George Balanchine has guided the dancers through arresting intricacies.

And, as is always the case in superior entertainments, no listing of credits quite does justice to the whole. Set "Louisiana Purchase" down as luxurious entertainment, which gets better as it goes along and ends in a fine swirl—a handsome and likable show, full of melody and Mr. Moore and gently salted with political pleasantries. It is obviously to be seen.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, May 29, 1940

The Senator

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THE interesting political career of Mr. Victor Moore once again adds joy to the musical comedy season, this time when we are in particular need of all available joys. It would be insulting your theatrical education to ask if you remember Mr. Moore as the Vice-President of the United States in "Of Thee I Sing" and as the American Ambassador to Russia in "Leave It to Me!" Well, now the eminent statesman is to be found as a lonely Republican Senator from New Hampshire investigating corruption in the sovereign state of Louisiana and having a tough time of it fighting off the attempts to frame him. Always a delightful comedian, Mr. Moore seems even more expert than ever in this "Louisiana Purchase," and, aided by an attractive Irving Berlin score, a generally lively Morrie Ryskind book, a colorful production and such expert performers as Miss Vera Zorina and William Gaxton, he manages to provide us with a properly entertaining musical comedy.

It seems curious to say at this late date that Mr. Moore is even improving as a comedian, but I venture to state that I think he is. It isn't that he is funnier than usual or that he manages his suggestion of helpless pathos any more engagingly. It is merely that he, seems to me to have grown increasingly legitimate as an actor; to have succeeded in giving not only an amusing and enormously likable performance but a genuine, completely rounded

and quite brilliant characterization of a bewildered little man fighting back with high courage at his unscrupulous foes. In the book of "Louisiana Purchase," Mr. Ryskind has wisely given his hero several opportunities to prove himself smarter than his enemies, a thing never heard of in the previous roles written for Mr. Moore, and the comedian handles them with unusual skill. You must see him confounding the wily Mr. Gaxton to find that musical comedy's most oppressed and timid soul can also manage upon occasion to be a pretty shrewd fellow and yet never lose the flavor of his fine characterization.

The only trouble I found with Mr. Ryskind's book is that its political satire is not always especially striking and that it is rather given

to playing on that one theme of the attempted framing of the Senator by a series of women too insistently. On the other hand, though, it frequently is vastly funny in its unabashedly hard-boiled fashion and it is always serviceable as a vehicle for its admirable stars. As for Mr. Berlin's score, it struck me as being gay, amusing, tuneful and charming, managing in such numbers as "Louisiana Purchase," "Outside of That I Love You," "What Chance Have I?" and "The Lord Done Fixed Up My Soul," among others, to be equally effective in both the music and the lyrics. The production, too, is of that lavish sort that Mr. De Sylva is accustomed to provide for his shows, and it is always pleasant to look upon. Of course, all musical comedies must have their ballets, and, since this is the case, it is a comfort to find Miss Zorina in them.

It is, of course, not only as a ballerina that Miss Zorina is of such help to "Louisiana Purchase." Once more she proves herself one of the loveliest of musical comedy performers, playing with grace, charm, humor and that sort of personal radiance that is so much more important than any of the other qualities, the role of the first and most sentimental of the series of ladies bent on framing Senator Loganberry. Mr. Gaxton is again what a foot-ball writer might be tempted to call a tower of strength in the backfield, adding that inexhaustible zest and energy of his to the part of a sympathetic member of the Louisiana corruptionist ring, who is both hero and villain of the new show. If only for his sense of excitement Mr. Gaxton would be of aid to a musical show. Miss Irene Bordoni is likewise present in her customarily amiable fashion, and a young singer named Carol Bruce, who can put over a song with much effectiveness in a rather too assured way, was one of the successes of the evening. "Louisiana Purchase" seems destined for success if outside events are not too much for it.